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SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL DEMOGRAPHY: BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Abstract

This study examines the demographics of SACs and the schools they serve, and proposes that demographic similarity with the school principal influences the SAC membership. The findings draw attention to the likelihood that appointment to SAC chair may be contingent on an individual's demographic similarity with the school principal. Principals also show a preference for recruiting council members who are school employees and structure the membership in ways that create a pretense of compliance with rules on council composition. These findings are consistent with studies which suggest that leadership will favor individuals with similar attitudes and demographic characteristics (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The challenge of increasing diversity in school advisory councils lies not only in policy mandates of race representation, but also in understanding and managing the dynamics of group composition.

Reform efforts in educational organizations have focused on creating governance structures that provide greater access to and influence over decisions about schooling. Parent and community involvement in decision-making is widely held to be an essential component of successful school improvement (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998). Much of the work of school governance has been assigned to school-site councils devolving some decision making authority to teachers, principals, parents and business leaders in order to stimulate and sustain improvement. However, assuring that participation is extended to all racial and ethnic groups within schools attracts attention and motivates calls for policies to promote diversity in governance councils.

In this project, the argument is developed that demographic features of School Advisory Councils suggest a preference for racial and role homogeneity. While there are a variety of controls over the membership selection process of advisory councils, demographic patterns of membership suggest the strong effect of demographic similarity. Increasing diversity in school advisory councils has become a major challenge. However, the overall results of group demography research have been mixed (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Research indicates that group heterogeneity is positively related to novel problem solving, generation of strategic alternatives, decision-making quality, and creativity (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988; Jackson, May, & Whitney, 1995; Pfeffer, 1983). In contrast, homo-

geneous groups, whose members share common experiences or history, will think similarly, have comparable attitudes, and share language about issues and therefore risk inertia (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Janis, 1982; Rhodes, 1983).

A potential limitation in this argument is whether using the demographic factors of ethnic diversity and constituency (parent, teacher, student, or business/community leader) might capture the collective inclination of the council. However, this approach is supported by Pfeffer's (1983) arguments that demographic indicators may provide objective representations of constructs that are otherwise difficult to collect and validate. Moreover, this examination of council demography might provide support for speculating about the moderating role of the principal in council membership. Research suggests that leaders associate demographic features with task-related attributes (Jackson, 1996) and that similarity enhances leaders' trust and liking (Epitropaki & Martin, 1999; Yukl & Fu, 1999). Accordingly, demographic similarities may be associated with the leader's influence on council membership.

Rationale and Background

National school reform efforts have focused on redesigning governance structures to provide greater access to, and influence over, decisions about schooling. State and local policies are based on engaging local stakeholders in partnerships for changing schools to meet the needs of the communities they serve. The rationale for these reforms has been to empower school professionals and position parents to act as partners with educators in the schooling of their children. It is supposed that giving stakeholders the opportunity to make decisions at the school level benefits the organization, allowing school advisory councils to analyze problems, consider the best methods, and monitor performance.

Establishment of school governance councils has been the centerpiece of school reform agendas of State Departments of Education since the 1990s (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998). Citizen participation in school advisory councils has been widely legislated as a mechanism for increased accountability to the parents and community at large, along with strengthened community support for their schools (Wohlstetter, Smyer & Mohrman, 1994). It is thought that distributed site-based school governance provides more transparent control structures and improved performance.

Much of the debate about school governance arrangements is about whether the reforms signal a real shift in power. Questions center on the type of authority, distribution of authority, and the level of discretion possessed by the council. Recommendations emerging from this debate revolve around council structures. School advisory councils usually assume one of three forms: administrative control, in which the principal is the primary decision maker; professional control, where teachers are prima-

ry decision makers; and community control, where school governance is dominated by parents and community members (Murphy & Beck, 1995). Actual implementation of these models, however, has failed to alter the traditional decision-making patterns in schools (Malen & Ogawa, 1988). School principals limited issues debated by councils, controlled information and restricted decision-making influence of parents, making school councils little more than "rubber stamps" for decisions made by principals (Hess, 1996). Strategies for addressing these obstacles have elicited legislative clarification of the council membership and tasks, provision of expanded authority, and some budgetary control. In fact, Florida has legislatively mandated that a "a majority of the members of each school advisory council must be persons who are not employed by the school" (Fla. Stat. ch. 1001.452(1)(a), 2009).

Teachers and principals, the people closest to the classroom, would be the best decision-makers for the schools because they have the most information about the school (Murphy & Beck, 1995). Teacher participation in school governance leads to greater commitment to change and enables more effective teachers (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Smylie, 1992). Other research on involving teachers in decision making has been positive, finding that such authority increases job satisfaction, attendance, and productivity (Hess, 1996; Murphy & Beck, 1995; Taylor & Bogotch, 1994). However, some studies question the readiness of administrators, teachers and parents to participate in school-based decision-making processes with the resultant shifts in authority, power and responsibility (Hess, 1996; Malen & Ogawa, 1988). At the same time, other authors characterize the involvement of parents in the governance structure of public education as a struggle for control:

> From advisor to equal partner, from passive listener to decision maker—indeed, from fundraiser to hell-raiser—the role of parents in schools is changing. Parents are becoming more vocal about being involved in education decision making. The family is becoming important as an instructional partner. And market-based education initiatives, such as charter schools and voucher programs, are changing parents from citizens to customers (Fege, 2000, p. 39).

Florida School Advisory Councils

In 1991, the Florida Legislature enacted the Florida School Accountability Act, providing for a system of school improvement, focusing on student outcomes and giving each school the authority to be responsible for the education of its students, through collaboration among the business community, parents, students, teachers and administrators. Legislation requires that these advisory councils be termed "School Advisory Councils" (SAC). The primary purpose of the SAC is to assist in the preparation and

monitoring of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) to guide the school's action toward improving student achievement. To accomplish that objective, the councils decide how school improvement funds are spent, decide jointly with faculty how school recognition funds are spent, assist principals with the school budget, and perform functions as prescribed by regulations of their local school boards.

The state requires that the composition of SACs reflect the ethnic, racial, and economic diversity of the community served by the school (Fla. Stat. ch. 1001.452(1)(a), 2009). The SAC membership includes the principal, teachers, instructional support personnel, non-instructional personnel, parents, business and community leaders, and students. Teachers, instructional support personnel, non-instructional personnel representatives and parents are elected by the group they represent. Procedures for recruiting and selecting business and community leaders are established by the district school board. Students must be included by election at the high school level and may be included at the middle school level if the school decides to invite them to participate. In addition, the majority of the SAC members must not be employed by the school on whose SAC they serve. A chairperson is elected annually by the council, and each member has an equal role in the decision-making process.

The requirement in Florida that elected parent and community members exceed the number of school employees seeks to minimize professional privilege and offset the pro forma endorsement of decisions made by the principal. Schools are required to collaborate and share authority with parents and the community in developing and implementing a plan for school improvement according to Fla. Stat. ch. 1001.452(1)(a) (2009). Cooper and Bloomfield (2003) describe this shift as a new model of performance-based school governance relationships that requires schools to engage in "strategic management," extending shared authority to planning, setting, monitoring and reporting on annual achievement goals.

Two obvious trends in school governance are the increasing use of school-based advisory councils for decision making and the mounting demands to be culturally and racially inclusive in assembling the membership of those councils. A challenge, then, for school advisory councils is maintaining productive social cohesion in mandated demographically and culturally diverse groups. The impact of diversity on group work is critical in light of current policy emphasis on SAC membership that represents all school community stakeholders. Within these heterogeneous advisory councils is the potential for demographically similar individuals to align and form somewhat homogeneous subgroups. Thus, effective management of diversity in school advisory councils may be critical to maximize performance.

Since advisory councils have been introduced as a means of both enhancing stakeholder involvement and improving organizational outcomes, the diversity of councils has become increasingly important. There have been many studies in organizational literature on group diver-

sity with respect to demographic attributes such as gender, race, and age. While there has been extensive research on group diversity, the literature still reveals conflicting results with regard to the effects of the dispersion of demographic attributes and improved organizational outcomes. Some studies have shown that group heterogeneity is positively related to novel problem solving, generation of strategic alternatives, decision-making quality, and creativity (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988; Jackson, May, & Whitney, 1995; Pfeffer, 1983). On the other hand, studies indicate that group heterogeneity may decrease social interaction and communication (Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992). Moreover, homogeneous groups, whose members share common experiences or history, will think similarly, have comparable attitudes, and share language about issues, therefore risk inertia (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Janis, 1982; Rhodes, 1983). Even though there is substantial evidence that diverse groups are beneficial for work requiring creativity and sagacity, there is also evidence that people usually show preferences for social groups that are similar to them in categories such as gender, race, age, and status (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by a framework that suggests homophily is a basic organizing principle of social groups. Homophily is the principle that people are attracted to and choose to interact with others who are similar to them (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). This principle activates social-categorization (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reichers, & Wetherell, 1987) where individuals use salient attributes such as race and gender to identify with others and form subgroups. Subgroup identity based on some salient characteristic leads to, as social identity theory suggests, subgroup members seeing themselves as insiders and viewing those that differ as outsiders. Social identity theory proposes that group boundaries formed by this social-categorization generate beliefs and attitudes about group insiders and outsiders that reduce communication and collaboration (Lau & Murninghan, 1998; Sawyer, Houlette, & Yeagley, 2006). Research suggests that social boundaries lead people to view group outsiders as less trustworthy and cooperative than group insiders (Tajfel, 1982). Other scholars noted that "people who are demographically different… will be perceived by their colleagues more negatively, on average, and those who are demographically similar to others…will be perceived by their colleagues more positively, on average" (Flynn, Chatman & Spataro, 2001, p. 417–418).

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1985) asserts that demographic similarity encourages identification of oneself with others who share common attributes. In addition, contexts that augment the significance of a particular identity lead to increased group identification (Emler & Hopkins, 1990). Studies show that group members seek to establish and

maintain a positive social identity by showing favoritism to members in the same category (Billig & Tajfel, 1973). This favoritism can lead to discrimination or self-segregation and conflict (Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999).

Ethnic and racial identities are particularly strong and have proven to be important for their impact on interpersonal attraction (McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978). People tend to be attracted towards those who share similar race (Weber, 1997). Likewise, racial and ethnic identities provide a frame of reference from which leaders initiate, maintain, and structure their relationships with other group members (Brewer, 2000). Individuals who share similar race with the leader may be more likely to gain access to limited resources (Hardin, 1995). In contrast, race dissimilarity is negatively associated with supervisors liking subordinates (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). Individuals who are dissimilar to the group leader in race or gender may perceive themselves as outsiders to the group with less access to information, resources and support compared to group members who were similar to the leader (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Moreover, research shows that individuals racially dissimilar to the group were less committed to the organization (Riordan & Shore, 1997; Tsui et al., 1992).

This study examines the demographics of SACs and the schools they serve, and proposes that demographic similarity with the school principal influences the SAC membership. Studies have demonstrated that similarity enhances interpersonal attraction or discrimination in favor of similar members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Concern over the potential of school principals to construct and maintain SAC membership that serves as little more than a "rubber stamp" has promulgated legislative and policy initiatives that mandate selection processes. However, preference for recruiting and selecting similar individuals may occur even when structures are in place to promote demographic balance. This argument is consistent with social identity theory; thus school principals may prefer demographically similar individuals for membership on school advisory councils.

The pervasive relationship between demographic similarity and association has important implications for information sharing and influence in an organization. This study explores the tendency for racial and ethnic similarity to induce more homogeneous school advisory council membership. In spite of the fact that policies require councils to be diverse, it is speculated here that SACs may not represent the racial and ethnic structure of their school communities. This study also examines whether there is a relationship between the school principal's race and SAC membership demography.

Sample and Data Sources

A large Florida school district was chosen as the empirical setting for this study. The primary focus of this study is the demographic features of School Advisory Councils and how mandated council structure, such as

increasing the proportion of parent/community members, may be thwarted by the schools. The selected school district's student characteristics are comparable to State averages. The school district's largest ethnic category is White, non-Hispanic with about 23% Black and 22% Hispanic. Approximately 10% of the student population has limited English proficiency. Almost half of the students (47%) qualify for free or reduced lunch rates. However, despite some overall similarities with the state, it is important to note that this district is one of the largest in the state and in the nation, with over 200 schools and nearly 200,000 students, portending a distinctiveness that may limit generalizability.

Data on SAC characteristics were obtained from School Improvement Plans posted on the school district's website. The plans provided data on council composition which included race and constituency (parent, teacher, student, or business/community leader). Schools that were designated as career or vocational schools, alternative education centers or exceptional student education centers were excluded from the study. The resultant data set includes 186 schools (22 senior high, 38 middle and 126 elementary).

Findings

Data on school council demography were gathered from 186 schools in a single school district. There were 126 elementary schools in size from 329 students to 1287 students. The number of members in SACs in these schools that ranged from 8 to 36. Average size of SAC membership of all elementary schools was 17.11. There was no required number of members for SAC, so size of school is unrelated to the size of the SAC. The number of school employees who were members of SACs ranged from 3 to 16, with an average of 7.48. Parent membership ranged from 3 to 18, with an average of 7.60. Members from local businesses and the community ranged from 1 to 8, with an average of 2.02.

There were 38 middle schools, ranging in size from 601 students to 1622 students. The size of the SACs ranged from 11 to 30 members, with an average of 20.05. The number of school employees serving as members of SAC ranged from 5 to 14, with an average of 8.68. Parent membership ranged from 4 to 13, with an average of 7.57. The number of members identified as coming from business or community ranged from 1 to 6, with an average of 1.97. Including students as members is optional at the middle school level. Seventeen of the schools had student representation ranging from 1 to 12 student members, with an average of 4.06.

The 22 high schools examined in this study ranged in size from 1211 students to 2712 students. Membership of the SACs ranged in size from 13 to 43, with an average of 25.14. The number of school employees serving on SAC ranged from 5 to 17, with an average of 10.14. Parent membership ranged from 3 to 20, with an average of 7.59. Members representing local

business and/or the community ranged from 1 to 8, with an average of 2.32. Student representation on SAC is required at the high school level. Student membership numbers ranged from 2 to 12, with an average of 5.09.

Appointments of principals to schools based on race seem to be a pervasive practice of this district. Table 1 shows that on average, a Black principal works at a school with 30% more Black students than a White principal. A Hispanic principal works at a school with an average of 10% more Hispanic students and 10% more Black students than White principals. Both Black and Hispanic principals worked at schools with considerably more students in poverty (21% and 13% more respectively). A Chi-square test revealed a very low probability that this distribution occurred by chance (29.975, $df = 6$, $p < 0.0001$).

Table 1

Demographics of Student Populations in Schools with White, Black or Hispanic Principals

		Average student population			
Race of school principals	*N*	White	Hispanic	Black	Poverty
Black principals	32	27.29%	19.50%	47.65%	68.48%
Hispanic principals	25	32.16%	34.76%	26.80%	60.72%
White principals	129	49.55%	25.41%	17.05%	47.92%

Cursory examination of the demographics of SAC membership (Table 2) reveals average SAC composition that is somewhat similar to average student demographics in schools with White, Black or Hispanic principals. The memberships of SACs in schools with Black principals more closely represent their student demographics. SAC memberships in schools with Hispanic and White principals showed notable differences from their student populations. However, differences for schools with Hispanic principals were more prominent. The Black representation on SACs showed the least discrepancy from student demographics, with Blacks underrepresented by an average of 2.20% in schools with Hispanic principals to 3.05% and 3.06% for White and Black principals respectively. Hispanic underrepresentation on SACs ranged from 3.00% with Black principals to 8.24% for Hispanic principals. Schools with White principals had SACs that underrepresented Hispanics by an average of 5.99%. Whites were overrepresented in SACs regardless of the race of the principal. Schools headed by Hispanic principals had White overrepresentation on SACs by an average of 15.52%. White principals had Whites overrepresented in SACs by 13.71%, while Black principals showed the least divergence with SACs in which Whites were overrepresented by 7.87%. A Chi-square test showed statistically significant differences (27.203, $df = 4$, $p < 0.0001$).

Table 2

Demographics of SAC Membership in Schools with White, Black or Hispanic Principals

		Average SAC membership		
Race of school principals	*N*	White	Hispanic	Black
Black principals	32	35.16%	16.50%	44.59%
Hispanic principals	25	47.68%	26.52%	24.60%
White principals	129	63.26%	19.42%	14.45%

Tables 3–5 present the average representation of the race of SAC chairs by the race of school principals separately for school levels. Florida Statutes (Fla. Stat. ch. 1001.452(1)(a), 2009) require each SAC to elect their own chairperson annually. Whites made up 72% of the SAC chairs in the sample, while only 13% and 15% of the SACs were chaired by Blacks and Hispanics respectively. There is substantial homogeneity across principal racial groups and race of SAC chairs. Blacks and Hispanics tend to constitute a larger proportion of SAC chair positions for Black and Hispanic principals than they did for White principals in elementary and high schools. The most even racial distribution of SAC chairs is found in the middle schools, although the low number of Hispanic SAC chairs is notable.

Table 3

Race Distribution of SAC Chairs, by Race of Elementary School Principals

Race of elementary school principal			SAC chair demographics			
			Race		Affiliation	Gender
	N	Male	Black	Hispanic	School employee	Male
Black	15	20.0%	4(26.67%)	3(20.00%)	14(93.33%)	2(13.33%)
Hispanic	18	5.56%	3(16.67%)	4(22.22%)	18(100.0%)	4(22.22%)
White	93	13.98%	7(7.53%)	13(13.98%)	71(76.34%)	20(21.51%)

Table 4

Race Distribution of SAC Chairs, by Race of Middle School Principals

Race of middle school principal	*N*	Male	SAC chair demographics			
			Race		Affiliation	Gender
			Black	Hispanic	School employee	Male
Black	14	35.71%	4(28.57%)	0(0.0%)	9(64.29%)	3(21.43%)
Hispanic	3	66.67%	0(0.0%)	1(33.33%)	2(66.66%)	1(33.33%)
White	21	47.62%	4(19.05%)	3(14.29%)	19(90.48%)	5(23.81%)

Table 5

Race Distribution of SAC Chairs, by Race of High School Principals

Race of high school principal	*N*	Male	SAC chair demographics			
			Race		Affiliation	Gender
			Black	Hispanic	School employee	Male
Black	3	33.33%	3(100.0%)	0(0.0%)	3(100.0%)	1(33.33%)
Hispanic	4	75.00%	0(0.0%)	2(50.0%)	1(75.0%)	1(25.0%)
White	15	53.33%	0(0.0%)	2(13.33%)	13(86.66%)	3(20.0%)

To examine the relationship between the race of the school principal and the race of the SAC chair, the odds ratios offered a useful approach for evaluating practical significance (Table 6). The odds are the probability of the race of the SAC chair being associated with the race of the principal. The odds ratio compares the odds for the two groups by dividing the odds of their being a minority SAC chair with a minority principal with the odds of their being a minority SAC chair with a white principal. Computing an odds ratio for this relationship provides a practical measure of how much the race of the SAC chair was influenced by the race of the school principal. The 95% confidence interval for each odds ratio is provided. Since in this study race was classified under three categories, Black and Hispanic categories were combined (minority) to create a dichotomy.

Using Fisher's exact probability test for differences, significant differences were found for elementary and high schools, and for all schools combined. The odds ratio means that minority principals were 2.69 times more likely to have a minority SAC chair than were White principals in elementary schools. For all school levels, the overall odds ratio was 2.51, indicating that minority principals were two and a half times as likely to have a minority SAC chair when compared to White principals.

For high schools, the overall odds ratio is 16.25. This may be an example of a disadvantage of using odds ratio. When there are only a few cases in one category relative to the others, the odds ratio may become quite large, as in this instance. The difference here may or may not be of practical importance. The confidence interval (1.77, 148.85) is too wide to say what the implications might be for this sample.

Table 6

Association of the Race of SAC Chair by Race of School Principal

Race of principal	White SAC chair	Minority SAC chair	Odds of independent variable	Overall odds ratio (95% confidence interval)	Effect size φ	*p* value
Elementary schools						
Minority	19(58%)	14(42%)	0.74	2.69 (1.15–6.29)	0.21	0.024
White	73(78%)	20(22%)	0.27			
Middle schools						
Minority	12(71%)	5(29%)	0.42	0.83 (0.21–3.32)	-0.04	1.0
White	14(67%)	7(33%)	0.50			
High schools						
Minority	2(29%)	5(71%)	2.50	16.25 (1.77–148.85)	0.58	0.01
White	13(87%)	2(13%)	0.15			
All schools						
Minority	33(58%)	24(42%)	0.73	2.51 (1.28–4.90)	0.20	0.008
White	100(78%)	29(22%)	0.29			

Note. For these analyses, the race variable was recoded as a dichotomous variable, white and minority.

Florida Statutes (Fla. Stat. ch. 1001.452(1)(a), 2009) require that the membership composition of SACs represent the ethnic, racial, and economic communities served by the schools. It is the responsibility of the local school boards to implement policies for the establishment of SACs in each school and to review the ethnic and racial compositions of the councils. Pursuant to Fla. Stat. ch. 11.45(7) (2009), the annual financial audits of district school boards include identifying significant compliance issues that affect the operations of the school districts. Part of the audit procedures is a test to determine whether SAC membership meets composition requirements specified in law. Auditors are instructed to be guided by an advisory legal opinion–AGO 2008-16 from Florida's Attorney General (2008) when testing for compliance. This opinion explains that the composition of SACs must represent the "ethnic, racial, and economic community in the geographic area served by the school" rather than the district at

large. State audits of school districts (Florida Auditor General, 1998-2007) from 1998 to 2007 report 27 incidents of school districts whose minority ethnic and racial memberships were underrepresented by as little as 4% to as much as 60%.

Review of the schools in this study revealed that several SACs had a minority ethnic or racial membership percentage that was less than each school's comparable student demographic percentage by at least 15%, or an average of three SAC members. Blacks were underrepresented by as much as 15 to 26% in 19 SACs. Hispanics were underrepresented by as much as 15 to 19% in 13 SACs and by more than 20% in nine SACs. Whites were underrepresented in two SACs by 22% and 32%.

It must be the case that if some groups are underrepresented in the SACs, other groups are overrepresented. Blacks were overrepresented by 17 to 21% in four SACs. Whites were overrepresented by as much as 15 to 24% in 50 SACs and by 25% or more in 29 SACs. Hispanics were not overrepresented in any of the SACs in this sample. Overall, differences in school demography and SAC composition—minorities underrepresented or whites overrepresented by 15% or more—occurred in 87 (47%) schools.

Schools with Black principals had Blacks underrepresented on SAC by more than 15% in five out of 32 schools (16%) and overrepresented in two schools (6%). Hispanics were underrepresented in one school (3%) and Whites were underrepresented in two schools (6%) headed by Black principals. Whites were overrepresented in seven of 32 schools (22%).

In schools with Hispanic principals, Blacks were underrepresented on SAC by more than 15% in four out of 25 schools (16%) and were overrepresented in one school (4%). Hispanics were underrepresented in six of the 25 schools (24%) led by Hispanic principals and Whites were overrepresented in 13 schools (52%).

For the schools with White principals, Blacks were underrepresented on SAC in ten of 129 schools (8%) and were overrepresented in two schools (1.5%). Hispanics were underrepresented in 15 schools (12%) and were not overrepresented in any schools. Whites were overrepresented on SAC in 60 of 129 schools (47%) and were not underrepresented in any of the schools headed by White principals.

Florida Statutes (Fla. Stat. ch. 1001.452(1)(a), 2009) require that the majority of members on a SAC must not be employees of the school. Reports from the Florida Auditor General (2009) found four school districts had schools with SACs made up of a majority of school employees. In this sample, five schools self-reported SAC membership that did not include the required majority of non-employee members. Overall, SACs reported an average of 44% of their members as school employees. Given the apparent conformity with the non-employee majority policy, it is interesting to note that school advisory councils that include students in membership (some middle and all high schools) had more school employee members than parent and community members. Students were counted as

members not employed by the school, thereby permitting schools to technically comply with the law while having school employees significantly outnumber parent and community members (done in 18% of middle schools and 64% of high schools). Additionally, it seems the SACs rely heavily on the pool of school employee members for chairs. Eighty-two percent (N = 152) of the SAC chairs were school employees.

Discussion

The present study contributes to the scant research on school-based governance councils by highlighting the importance of including demography in the study of school advisory councils and participatory governance. Social categorization theory suggests that group attachment should increase among individuals of the same race. Additionally, similarities may be based on attitudes, values and behaviors defined by the profession or affiliation (employed by the school) promoting positively identifying oneself as a member of a social category. This does appear to be the case. Specifically, the findings draw attention to the likelihood that appointment to SAC chair may be contingent on an individual's professional and demographic similarity with powerful actors in the organization. While the concept of school principal and SAC chair similarity may be less meaningful if minority principals are assigned to schools with disproportionate numbers of minority students, it seems reasonable to assume that if some pattern exists in the demographics among SACs, the concept is meaningful.

Findings also suggest that schools deliberately employ strategies to solidify the influence of particular constituency groups. Demographic characteristics of councils may be designed to protect the needs of constituencies and are therefore likely to increase the already substantial advantages of the school principal. The findings provide evidence for the effect of the power of the principal on demographic similarity of the principal with the SAC chair. These findings are consistent with studies which suggest that leadership will favor individuals with similar attitudes and demographic characteristics (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

SAC composition is likely the result of differential recruiting. Demographically skewed advisory councils can result even if principals are perfectly neutral in their recruiting practices and strive to bring in members who perfectly mirror the racial composition of the local school community. Still, schools explicitly committed to diverse SAC membership may encounter great difficulty in achieving racial balance. Reports from state audits of school districts stated that staff suggested it was difficult to find people from minority racial and ethnic groups willing to serve. Schools sent out notices in native languages, had bilingual staff telephone parents, had translators at schools' open houses, and offered transportation and childcare for members during meetings. Yet evidence from the audit reports and the findings of this study show that such well-intentioned re-

cruiting efforts will falter if the members of the minority groups cannot see the value of participating on SAC.

In light of the connections between group diversity and decision-making quality, it is important to understand the forces that affect the likelihood of creating racially diverse SACs. Research shows that group diversity has a positive effect on access to information, problem identification, and implementation of decisions (Bantel & Jackson, 1989; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Race is a particularly important dimension on which people connect. The apparent relationship between race of the school principal and the race of the SAC chair may suggest the presence of some attachment based on race and an increase of social pressure. The role of the school principal in shaping the demography of the SAC has implications for future research.

To some degree, this study also explores whether school site governance councils' memberships are shaped to represent primarily the interests of the school and its employees. The findings suggest that principals may show a preference for recruiting council members who are school employees and may structure the membership in ways that create a pretense of compliance with rules on council composition. The question remains, however, about whether these school advisory councils are accountable and transparent in their control structures. The legislated structures of these school advisory councils are designed to place teachers, parents and business partners in a position to influence decision-making. According to Malen (1994), however, parents serving on school councils are often swayed by both the teachers and the principal. Despite the intentions of Florida's reform efforts, principals and teachers may still be adept at maintaining their substantial advantage over other stakeholders who may be perceived as lacking the knowledge needed to make critical decisions.

Malen's (1994) argument that parents are not in a position to influence, but rather to support the decisions made by the professionals, may be valid. It seems the SACs may be deliberately employing strategies to represent primarily the interests of the school and its employees. Controlling the leadership and membership of the SACs may serve to protect the needs of the professionals in the school and may be therefore likely to foster more of a status quo orientation.

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